



Helping Hands

Offering a helping hand to School Readiness Providers
A publication from Childcare Resource & Referral



Family Engagement Opportunities

Back to School Tips to Keep Your Home & Family On Track

The school year is now underway. Use these tips to set your family up for success and stay on track. With a few time & space-saving tips, you will start each day organized & ready to take on whatever comes your way!

- Establish a Routine
- Create a Homework Center
- Keep a Family Calendar
- Carve Out Time for Family

To read the full article & see additional tips, please visit the website:

<https://bestitle.com/back-to-school-tips/>



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ATTENTION HH READERS...

If you have a question, comment, or concern you would like addressed in an upcoming issue of *Helping Hands*, please send an e-mail to:

Brianna.Deosca@ecs4kids.org.

We will do our best to find the answer, post the comment, and address the concern.

Thanks!
Brianna DeOsca
Editor



Indoor Activities for Toddlers Krystol Berry, Education Specialist

Sources: <https://letsliveandlearn.com/indoor-activities-for-toddlers/>



Looking for ways to beat the heat this summer but still wanting to keep your child busy? Try some of these fun activities with your child by using ordinary supplies from around your house. After you've tried them all, check out the linked website above to find even more great activity ideas!

1. Support your child's hand-eye coordination and fine motor development by giving them Cheerios or Fruit Loops to thread pipe cleaners through. Make it a game by racing to see who can thread on five cereal pieces first or who can thread the most red loops. If your child is not yet ready to thread the cereal on, this activity can still be useful by pre-threading the pipe cleaner and asking your child to pull them off one at a time. Either way, these are sure to be a great hit with kiddos, especially because they can eat the cereal when finished.
2. Turn any book into a peek-a-boo story by using sticky notes! Cover an object on the page with a sticky note and ask your little one to find it. This is a sure way to bring about joy and conversation as you encourage your little one to figure out what's hiding behind the sticky!
3. Take tip #2 one step further, if you can, try taping some animals to a wall or plate that are similar to the story (or any animal or toy will do) and ask your little one to help you rescue them. This is a great opportunity to build motor skills, enhance cognition through problem solving, and use language to model social skills such as manners: "I need help, please", "Oh thank you, I appreciate you helping me down."
4. This is a spin on the Animal Tape Rescue activity for little ones who do not like the sensation of tape or sticky things; instead, try freeing animals from a ribbon basket! Tie a few ribbons or strings across a basket and place animals in the basket. As your little one gets better at rescuing the animals, make it more challenging by asking them to find a specific animal or by finding an animal while closing their eyes.

CLASS Connection

Facilitating Exploration of Learning: Enhance your child's play by making an activity more challenging such as encouraging your infant to reach for an object that is farther away or asking your toddler to try an activity again while closing their eyes or using the other hand. Be sure to offer support as needed and be on the lookout for signs of frustration which could mean an activity is too challenging and needs to be scaled back.

Language Modeling: As your child completes an activity, be their biggest cheerleader by stating what they are doing in the moment. For example, "you found the brown donkey", is a strategy known as parallel talk and helps your child connect spoken words to physical actions.

Frozen Popsicle Chalk Krystol Berry, Education Specialist

Source: <http://www.readingconfetti.com/2013/05/frozen-popsicle-chalk.html>



Here is a great way to spark your child's interest in art and science while keeping them engaged in an outdoor hands-on activity this summer! Frozen popsicle chalk can be made in a variety of containers, such as popsicle molds, ice cube trays, or even small Tupperware containers. Though the popsicle sticks handles allow the user more control, these frozen chalks will be fun no matter what the shape is!

The ingredients for frozen chalk are a 1:1 mix of cornstarch and water, add a few drops of dish soap for easier clean up, and use tempera paint to color the chalk mixture. For vibrant colors, add more paint. Once the ingredients are mixed, pour into molds and freeze until solid.

Once the chalk is frozen, you can use it in many different ways:

- make 3D sculptures and observe how they change during the melting process
- experiment by mixing colors as they melt
- create stamp patterns or rub on hands and press onto sidewalk
- make beautiful artwork on the sidewalk
- use frozen chalk for boundary lines such as hopscotch, the floor is lava, or long jumping

Just remember not to eat these frozen treats!

CLASS Connections

Regard for Student Perspective - Follow student's lead by allowing them to decide which molds to use, what colors to make, and what to do with the frozen chalk popsicles outdoors.

Facilitation of Learning and Development - Ask students questions during play such as "Why did you choose that one?" or "What do you think would happen if you tried drawing it with your other hand?"

Science at Home: Rainbow in a Jar Krystol Berry, Education Specialist

Source: https://www.3m.com/3M/en_US/science-at-home-us/science-experiments-for-kids/rainbow-in-a-jar/

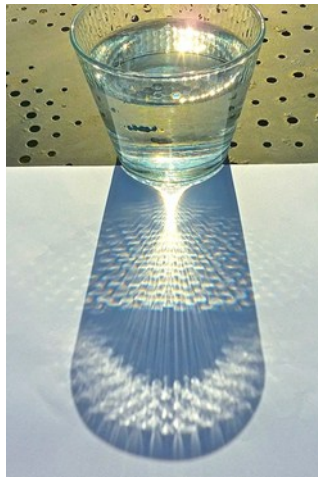


Photo Courtesy of <https://caidensscienceprojectscjs.weebly.com/results.html>

Have you ever been stuck inside on a rainy day and felt like a rainbow would be just the thing to cheer you up? Well, now you and your kid(s) can make one, or several, using typical household items. This fun project requires only a white-bulb flashlight, a sheet of white paper or a white area such as a wall, approximately 6 oz of water, and a glass cup or bowl (for best rainbow effects, use crystal glass).

To complete this activity, place the white paper beneath the crystal glass, fill up 3/4 full, and shine the flashlight through it. Discuss and note your observations on a separate paper, if desired. To extend this activity, test other lights such as led, incandescent, or colored bulbs such as red, green, or blue.

When using the flashlight, you should be able to see a rainbow! You can also try this experiment using different colored sheets of paper, or different types of glass such as those with geometric designs, rings, or smooth glass. Add items to the water such as a sprinkle of glitter, a piece of sea glass, or a bead, and observe any changes in the reflected light.

CLASS Connections

Concept Development - Analysis and Reasoning, Predictions: students use previous knowledge to make predictions before completing an experiment; be sure to discuss what could happen during the experiment such as what colors might be seen, how it might change when holding a flashlight close to water or far away from water, or how using different light colors will create different reflections.

Language Modeling - Advanced vocabulary: reflection, refraction, hypothesis, experiment. Consider using these words during the experiment to increase your students' understanding and vocabulary. Encourage your student to think of more words and to define them, be sure to check in a dictionary as needed.

Resource: [Teacher Routine Guide.pdf](#)



Computer time is a great way to introduce students to technology. Technology is always evolving and as students get older, they will become more capable of understanding and utilizing it. Here are strategies for common challenging behaviors that may occur during this routine.

Taking Turns – There will likely be more students than computers, which means they will need to take turns. This is a great opportunity to teach taking turns. At a young age, students cannot grasp the concept of time very well. If one student has fifteen minutes on the computer, then the student waiting for the computer may feel like they're waiting an eternity. Introduce visual timers and explain to the child that once the timer turns yellow, that means there are two minutes remaining, which is a short time.

Social Story – If a student is very physically active, they may not want to sit for fifteen minutes on the computer. A social story is a wonderful way to explain to the student what is expected of them while on the computer. The story should meet the demands placed by the teacher onto the students and the student in the story should follow the rules. The student in the story should mirror the energy level to the actual student and show a clear interest in doing another activity. The resolution of the story should explain that once computer time is over, there will be plenty of opportunities to be physically active throughout the day.

Website: <https://kidsrkids.com/avalon-park/2021/08/18/tips-child-school-first-time/>

Save this article for your Transition to Kindergarten resources for the end of the year! As your child is preparing for their first day of kindergarten, be sure to plan in advance by considering some of the tips below - and if you'd like more, check out the website link above!

1. **Walk them through their new routine**. Just as they had to follow a routine to get ready for PreK or VPK, so too they will need a routine for Kindergarten. Start practicing the new routine about 2-3 weeks before Kindergarten is scheduled to begin. For example, if you know your little one will need to sleep earlier because they'll be waking up earlier for extended care, talk about it with them, and then practice it. Use visuals and rewards such as sticker charts or extra fun play time activities. Notice if your child is struggling to learn the new routine, talk to them to figure out how you can best support them, and be sure to follow *their* pace when implementing changes.

2. **Shop for school supplies with your child** and allow them to choose their supplies such as what color backpack or pencil pouch. Be sure to include them in packing their backpack so they know which pocket to find their scissors or crayons on their first day of school. This team activity can develop into a great opportunity for discussion such as: I wonder what kinds of pictures you'll be drawing with your new crayons, or what you'll be measuring with your new ruler, I am so excited to see the crafts you'll cut and create with your sharp, new scissors.

After your child's backpack is prepared, consider reading the story, *Pig in Jeans*, and discuss how Pig had solutions to so many problems just by being prepared. Make explicit connections to how you believe your child will also be prepared for Kindergarten and use this opportunity to discuss any fears your child may have about starting at a new school, or what they are most excited about.

If you'd like to read more books about starting Kindergarten, consider these titles:

The Day You Begin by Jacqueline Woodson

Worrysaurus by Rachel Bright

Brave Dave by Charles Andreae

Can I Play, Too? by Samantha Cotterill

Off to Kindergarten by Tony Johnston

20 Awesome DIY Sensory Bags Krystal Berry, Education Specialist

Resource: <https://kidsactivitiesblog.com/77591/20-sensory-bags-to-make/>

Are you looking for ways to get involved in activities with your child(ren)? Try making sensory bags together! These bags can provide hours of play and can be converted into tubes or dumped into bins – but even better is that they can be brought on the road for travel, making them a great alternative to screen time.

The first thing you'll need is a theme. Perhaps your child loves all things starry and sparkly, things that GO! Halloween pumpkins, flowers and leaves, or even polka dots. If you're considering making these for your infant or very young child, remember to always supervise them during play since they are more likely to put things in their mouth as a way of exploring.

Next, gather your materials. You'll want to use heavy duty style baggies, or freezer bags with a double zip, to ensure they will stand up to child play. For the liquid filling, consider using hair gel, shaving cream, paint, baby oil-water mixture, vegetable oil-water mixture, plain water, and consider adding a few drops of food coloring if desired. There's no need to fill a sensory bag 100% because there needs to be room to squish the materials around without bursting the bag.

Finally, add a few small items and seal the bag. Be careful to use objects that will not poke holes in the bags! Try taping three bags in a row on a table or on the floor, using painters' tape for easy removal, allowing children to engage in floor play! As you and your child create these bags together, be sure to encourage them to help you assemble the bags and engage in conversation using some of the strategies below.

Self-Talk: narrate your actions in the moment, "I am pouring water into the bag."

Parallel-Talk: narrate your child's actions in the moment, "You added red glitter to the bag."

Repetition, Extension, Expansion: repeat what your child says, correct grammar if necessary, and add something new. For example, if your child says, "My turn", you could respond by saying, "Yes, now it is your turn, what would you like to add to our bag?"

Advanced vocabulary: use advanced vocabulary with child friendly definitions such as, "would you like to squeeze in the shaving cream, squeeze is when your hand presses real tight and makes something come out, like when we squeeze the toothpaste tube or when you give your stuffy a big hug."

Back and forth exchanges: when your child makes a comment, "ooh, pretty!", try to respond back to encourage further discussion such as, "What do you think is pretty?" Continue this contingent responding, striving for five turns.



T.E.A.C.H

The T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education And Compensation Helps) Early Childhood® Scholarship Program funded by the Florida Office of Early Learning provides scholarships for early childhood teachers and facility/family home directors to work toward earning a degree in early childhood education (Associate, Bachelor's, or Master's), an Infant-Toddler Certificate, Florida Staff Credential, Director Credential, National CDA Assessment, or credential renewals.

Your T.E.A.C.H. scholarship will cover the majority of the cost of tuition and books, a per semester student access stipend, a tiered bonus structure for degree-seeking scholars, and much more!

Contact our office today at 877-FL TEACH (877-358-3224) to see how T.E.A.C.H. can work for you.

<https://teach-fl.org/>

T.E.A.C.H. Scholarships





Local Professional Development Opportunities (Training Calendar)

To register for one of our great training opportunities, please visit our website:

<https://www.ecs4kids.org/programs/regional-training-institute/>

Click on the registration link to see a list of available courses.

Click on a course and follow the directions for registration and payment.
The website provides a list of trainings and descriptions offered each quarter.

For CDA information and

questions, please contact

Danesha Morrow, Professional
Development Coordinator

904-726-1500 ext.2299

(904) 536- 2119 (cell)

VPK Corner Sarah March, Contract Coordinator

VPK FAST

Welcome to the 2025-26 school year!

An email was recently sent to providers with the PM dates for providers and reminders for the program year regarding VPK FAST.

Here are a few reminders:

Please remember to have staff take the VPK FAST Administrator course in Educator Academy if they will be assisting children with the FAST testing. You can create an account for the Educator Academy by following the steps in this document: [Renaissance Educator Academy Enrollment Guidance](#)

Once the Test Administrator course has been taken, please upload the Course certificate, Security Form and Prohibited Activities Form together in one file to the 25-26 Test Administrator folder in the document library in the provider portal.

Please label the file: **First name_ Last Name_ 25-26.**

Please note, this year we are able to accept electronic signatures on the forms.

The 2025-2026 Renaissance testing site is the same as last year. <https://global-zone05.renaissance-go.com/welcomeportal/7957988>

For providers who have classes with 82 days or less calendars, you must complete your PM 1 testing within the first 10 instructional days of your program.

Please check your External users to ensure you have someone listed as an Administrator for Renaissance.

You can also remove anyone from the external users who no longer needs access at your location.

The Performance Metrics and Designations are now available for the 24-25 school year on the VPK Accountability website <https://www.fldoe.org/schools/early-learning/vpk-accountability.stml>

If you have any questions, please contact Roushawn Saunders at VPK@ecs4kids.org.

Or call 904-726-1500 ext. 2241



Warm Line 1-800-238-3463

Ext. 2281 (CNBB)

Ext. 2227 (PSJ)



Do you have a concern about the health, development, disability, or special needs of a child? If so, call the Warm Line. The purpose of the warm line is to provide advice to child care personnel concerning strategies, curriculum, and environmental adaptations that allow a child to derive maximum benefit from the child care experience.